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ABSTRACT

School divisions were surveyed in the fall of 1992 as part of the Virginia State Board of Education's effort to establish criteria for the identification of educationally at-risk students, under the mandate of the State's General Assembly. All division superintendents were asked to review the Board's initial draft criteria for identification and to provide comments and suggestions in addition to responding to a survey. Responses were received from 118 division superintendents (89 percent of those surveyed). Most indicated that the state's funds were spent on a variety of existing and developing programs and services. Usual identification criteria included standardized test scores, the state Literacy Passport Test, overall poor academic performance, and poor performance on ability or readiness tests. Other criteria often used are frequent absence, behavior problems, and a history of delinquency. Dropout status, health criteria, poverty status, and other factors, such as English as a Second Language, are also considered. Most divisions plan new efforts and innovative instructional techniques for the future. Over 90 percent currently evaluate the services and programs they provide. (SLD)

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ED 362 588

SURVEY RESULTS:

HOW SCHOOL DIVISIONS IDENTIFY AND SERVE AT-RISK STUDENTS

A PRESENTATION TO

THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Virginia Department of Education

January 20, 1993

Background

School divisions were surveyed in the fall of 1992 as part of the Board of Education's effort to establish criteria for the identification of educationally at-risk students, pursuant to language added to the Standards of Quality (SOQ) by the 1992 General Assembly.

Specifically, Section 22.1-253.13.1 F of the Code of Virginia reads, in part:

> *"... The Board of Education shall establish criteria for identification of educationally at-risk students, which shall not be construed to be regulations as defined in § 9-6.14:4; however, the Board of Education may, from time to time, revise these identification criteria. ..."*

The 1992 General Assembly appropriated approximately $46.4 million in the 1992-94 biennium to support programs and services for at-risk students. Using updated student enrollment data, the figure in the Governor's budget for this item is now approximately $47 million.

Survey Design

A memorandum was sent to all division superintendents requesting them to 1) review the Board's initial draft criteria for identifying at-risk students, 2) provide the Department of Education with comments and suggestions pertaining to the draft, and 3) respond to a survey which asked the following questions:

- Which criteria does your division currently use to identify students who are educationally at-risk, and will new or additional criteria be used in the future?
- What programs, activities or services does your division currently provide for educationally at-risk students, and will any new programs or services be implemented in the future?
- How did your division utilize the new at-risk funding received in the 1992-93 school year?
- Does your division currently evaluate any of the programs, activities or services provided for at-risk students?

The survey was designed to gather general information about those risk indicators most frequently employed and programs and services most commonly provided by school divisions.

The survey was not designed to gather information on program content or quality, or on the number of students served by school divisions; nor was it intended as a regulatory instrument.

Responses to the draft criteria and the survey were received from 118 divisions (an 89 percent rate of response).

Use of 1992-93 At-Risk Funding

The General Assembly provided approximately $23 million to school divisions in the 1992-93 school year to provide programs and services for at-risk students.

- When asked how these funds are being utilized, most divisions indicated they are using this funding to support a variety of activities:
  - 60 percent of responding divisions indicated that part or all of their at-risk funding was used to serve more at-risk students with existing programs and services;
  - 53 percent of responding divisions indicated that part or all of their at-risk funding was used to improve or enhance existing programs and services for educationally at-risk students; and,
  - 48 percent of responding divisions indicated that part or all of their at-risk funding was used to develop new programs or services for educationally at-risk students.

- Of responding divisions, 98 percent used part or all their at-risk funds to serve more students, provide new programs or improve existing services.

- Although 18 divisions indicated that part or all of their at-risk funding was used to maintain existing at-risk programs and services with a redirection of local funds:
  - 16 of these divisions did use part of their at-risk funds for new or improved services; and,
  - Two divisions used their at-risk funds solely for this purpose.

Criteria for Identifying At-Risk Students

School divisions currently use a variety of indicators to identify educationally at-risk students, and most divisions use a combination of criteria to determine a student's risk status rather than relying on a single indicator.

Of responding divisions, <u>all</u> use one or more of the following <u>academic performance</u> criteria:

- Students scoring in the bottom quartile on standardized tests (98% of responding divisions);
- Students failing to pass the Literacy Passport Test (95%);
- Students with overall poor academic performance (92%); and,
- Students who perform poorly on ability or readiness tests (15%).

Of responding divisions, 98 percent use one or more of the following <u>behavior</u> criteria:

- Students who are frequently absent or truant (95% of responding divisions);
- Student behavior resulting in suspension or expulsion (91%); and,
- Students with a record of delinquency (69%).

Of responding divisions, 97 percent use one or more of the following <u>student outcome</u> criteria, other than test scores:

- Students who are overage or have been retained in grade (91% of responding divisions); and,
- Students who have dropped out of school (66%).

Criteria for Identifying At-Risk Students, continued

Of responding divisions, 82 percent use one or more of the following health criteria:

- Students with physical, mental or emotional health problems (71% of responding divisions);
- Pregnant or parenting students (71%); and,
- Students who use drugs or alcohol (69%).

Of responding divisions, 75 percent use one or more of the following poverty criteria:

- Students eligible for free school lunch (74% of responding divisions);
- Students whose families receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (32%); and,
- Students whose families receive food stamps (28%).

Other criteria employed by divisions to identify educationally at-risk students include:

- Students for whom English is a second language;
- Students who frequently change place of residence;
- Students who are homeless; and,
- Students with a history of family dropout.

Thirteen percent of responding school divisions indicated that they plan to employ new or different indicators to identify at-risk students in the 1993-94 school year.

Programs & Services for At-Risk Students

A high degree of diversity exists in the types of at-risk programs and services currently provided by school divisions. The most frequently occurring categories of these programs and services are presented below.

All responding divisions attempt to address the needs of educationally at-risk students by providing special programs for them, including:

- Summer school programs for at-risk students (92%);
- Career exploration and development programs (89%);
- Alternative education programs (81%);
- Supplemental reading programs in the early grades (76%);
- Preschool programs for four-year-old children (55%);
- Programs for teen parents (48%); and,
- Adult education programs for the parents of young children (35%).

All attempt to address the needs of at-risk students by providing additional teachers or support personnel, including:

- Services such as health, substance abuse or counselling (97%);
- Provision of tutors or instructional aides (95%);
- Reduced class size (77%); and,
- Other student support services (e.g. multi-agency staffing committees, student assistance and support groups).

Programs & Services for At-Risk Students, continued

All responding divisions attempt to address the needs of educationally at-risk students through one or more innovative instructional techniques, including:

- Staff development related to the instruction of at-risk students (93%);
- Developmentally appropriate practices in grades K-3 (88%);
- Peer tutoring (75%);
- Accelerated classrooms or schools (60%);
- Cooperative learning (60%);
- Mentor programs (59%); and,
- Computer-assisted instruction (7%).

Of responding school divisions, 52 percent indicate that they plan to implement new programs, activities or services for at-risk students in the 1993-94 school year, including:

- Early childhood programs;
- Alternative education programs; and,
- Programs for teen parents.

Program Evaluation

Of responding school divisions, 90 percent currently evaluate the programs and services they provide for at-risk students.

Like the programs and services themselves, evaluation activities vary among divisions -- some evaluation methods are informal while others are more complex or designed to evaluate a specific program or aspect of student improvement.

The most commonly employed evaluation methods are:

- Measuring improvement in student test scores;
- Measuring improvement in other variables, such as improved student behavior, increased rates of attendance and graduation, and decreased rates of student retention, suspension, truancy, tardiness and dropout;
- Continuous student observation by staff and ongoing evaluation by teachers; and,
- Conducting program satisfaction surveys completed by students, teachers, school staff and parents.

Divisions indicate that although at-risk programs are periodically evaluated or reviewed, almost all programs were evaluated formally in the pilot stage.

Summary

The majority of divisions are using new at-risk funding to:

- Serve more students;
- Provide new programs; and,
- Improve existing services.

Most divisions use a combination of indicators to determine if a student is at risk, including:

- Academic performance criteria;
- Student behavior criteria; and,
- Student health criteria.

A wide variety of programs and services are currently provided for at-risk students across the Commonwealth. These include:

- Preschool programs for four-year-old children;
- Provision of tutors and instructional aides;
- Health, substance abuse and counselling services; and,
- Alternative education programs.